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WILD TRAITS IN TAME ANIMALS.

IV.—THE PIG.

BY DR. LOUIS ROBINSON.

THE sheep and the pig may be classed apart from other domestic animals in one particular. Man makes but little use of them during their lifetime. With the exception of the annual tribute of wool which he exacts from the sheep, he chiefly benefits by appointing himself their sole heir and executor, and then arranging for their seasonable demise.

Beyond this unfortunate fellowship the sheep and the pig have but little in common either in habits or history. The more we examine them, the more evident it becomes that they have been developed among utterly different surroundings. Yet in both cases, all the characteristics which render them so valuable to us, served to preserve them during long epochs before the commencement of their captivity.

We now chiefly regard a live hog as so much perambulating bacon. His other physical and moral qualities are totally eclipsed by ideas about the number of pounds of pork which we hope and intend to inherit from him. Let us first, then, consider whence he gets his aptitude for laying on fat. Of course, it is plain that no wild animal could long exist in the condition of the prize hogs which we see exhibited in agricultural shows. Long continued and assiduous care has been exercised by men in enhancing this quality in the domestic breeds both in America and Europe, and in an even greater degree in the far East. Indeed, we are indebted for the delicate flavor and general high quality of our pork to the ingenious Chinaman nearly as much as for our tea and china tea-cups.

The wild boar of Europe is a scraggy giant who would need a vast deal of civilizing before his gaunt and sinewy frame could be cushioned over with the proper thickness and quality of adipose tissue. Very many years ago, breeders found that the European pigs were much improved by being crossed with the Chinese. These are of a different race altogether, and are not found wild anywhere at the present day. The careful Mongolians have kept and improved them for untold centuries, and this doubtless accounts for their superiority from the farmers' point of view.

But the disposition to lay on an enormous amount of fat when food is plentiful dates back far beyond the beginning of the Chinese Empire. And what is more, it was a most necessary habit of the pig's wild ancestors in any but hot climates; for in all probability the hog which did not get fat in the fall would perish during a hard winter. One would not think that there was much resemblance between fat pork and honey, yet analysts tell us that they are chemically very similar. In both cases they were, in the first place, stores laid up for winter use by their respective owners, which man, the arch-plunderer, has appropriated for his own purposes. There was this difference, however, that whereas the bees accumulated their savings in a joint stock bank the pig carried his about with him.

Throughout the spring and summer in Northern and Central Europe, the wild hog, by diligently grubbing for roots and whatever else he could find, managed to make a bare living. But when autumn came and the acorns and beech-mast fell, he revelled in plenty. Moreover, at this season, many of his enemies, such as the bears, were feasting on the ripe berries and nuts, so that he was left in comparative peace. The result was that, in the few weeks between the fall of the mast and the first severe weather, he filled out amazingly. Then came the winter, during which he had to face the cold, and find what food he could beneath the snow or on the hard frozen ground. Towards the end of winter the most trying time came. The earth was still hard with frost, and every nut or acorn in the forest had been picked up by the thousands of hungry searchers. The pig was no longer fat; his inward store had well nigh been consumed. It was always an anxious question with him whether he would "save his bacon" until the breaking of the frost.

You will see then that the hog, which had within his own private bank a dollar's worth of savings, in the form of lard,

when his fellows were insolvent, would in an exceptionally protracted and severe winter be one of the few to survive. He would naturally transmit his fattening tendencies to his descendants, and so it comes about that, in the present day, no animal so handsomely responds to liberal feeding as the domestic pig.

Many other beasts which live under somewhat the same conditions share with the hog this faculty for accumulating a store of fat during the fall, but in no other case has it been taken advantage of by man to such an extent.

There are two other characteristics of the pig which we find of great value ; viz.: his tough skin and bristly coat. We will now discuss the natural origin of these. We have seen that the horse, the ass, the sheep, and the goat, found it necessary to retire from low and marshy regions where cover was abundant and which swarmed with voracious foes.

Not so the wild hog. He stayed and faced the danger. If you observe the shape of a lean pig you see at once that he has been built for forcing his way through dense canebrakes and jungles. He is shaped something like a submarine boat or a Whitehead torpedo. His nose is the thin end of a wedge or rather a cone for forcing apart the close-set stems of his native thickets. His hide, especially about the shoulders and back, is extraordinarily tough.

The bristly covering of the wild hog is a perfect protection against the thorns and he will plunge at headlong speed through dense masses of bramble and briar where no other animal of his size and weight could follow. If any of us were to pursue the same track we should get our clothes, and afterwards our skins, torn to shreds. He merely gets his hair thoroughly combed and rather likes it than otherwise.

The true wild boars and the *feral* hogs which have escaped from captivity in various parts of the world, go about in herds for mutual protection ; and when one is attacked the others stand by him and defend him. This affords an explanation of the original use of the shrill voice of the pig, and of his readiness to exercise it whenever he is in trouble. In fact, whenever you hear a pig squealing you hear a testimony to the intrepid deeds of his race in the past, as eloquent and emphatic as a Fourth of July oration. In the wild state it was his appeal for help, to which he knew his brethren, one and all, would respond with splendid loyalty and courage. Many a hunter has had to climb a

tree to save his life after wounding one of a herd of peccaries. Now the hog would not expend his breath in ear splitting squeaks unless he felt pretty sure of getting some benefit from so doing. His squealing, therefore, amounts to a lively expression of faith in the noble moral qualities of his brethren. It conveys precisely the same sentiment as do the words of a stump orator when he says: "Gentlemen, I well know your constancy and your courage! You have proved many times in the past that you are no muggumps who go to roost on a fence when the party is in danger! I confidently look to you therefore to stand by me in the present tremendous crisis."

The continual grunting of the pig is also of interest as revealing something of the conditions of life of his wild ancestors. A herd of swine scattered in the long grass or among the brackens of a European forest would soon lose sight of one another. But the grunts of each would still advertise his presence to his neighbors; and so the individual members of the herd would not lose touch with the main body. Then there are grunts and grunts. If one of my readers will imitate the ingenious Mr. Garner, and take a phonograph to the nearest pig-sty he might get material to make up a book on the language and grammar of the hog. However thick the jungle the wild pig could, by taking note of the pitch and emphasis of the grunts to right and left of him tell pretty much what his hidden colleagues were thinking about.

There is another peculiarity of the *suidæ*, or pig tribe, which is of great importance to the farmer, and which at the same time tells a tragic tale of the circumstances of the early forefathers of our domestic hogs. They are very prolific, and produce from half a dozen to twenty at a birth, whereas the other animals which we have discussed produce as a rule only one or two.

Now, in a state of freedom the number of individuals of an established species remains fairly constant from year to year. If they doubled every year, the world would soon be overpopulated. Supposing they increased ten fold and could find sustenance, it would not take many generations to pack the whole surface of the earth with hogs as closely as a Chicago pork factory yard before a grand kill. There must, therefore, be a corresponding annual destruction of life to make up for the increase, or, more properly speaking, the rate of increase must become adjusted to the amount of annual waste.

But what a state of affairs this reveals ! Out of every family of a dozen only one or two were left alive by the following spring. Truly the pig paid dearly for his pig-headedness in sticking to the forest and the swamp ! The wolf and the bear, the lynx and the panther were the chief factors in this fearful process of subtraction. You may take it as a general law that when a beast is a member of a large family, born at the same time as himself, his prospects of long life are not good. A life assurance society would not take him at any price, except in the annuity department, nor would a company which grants compensation for accidents.

The natural term of life of the pig is longer than that of the sheep; and the frightful mortality implied by the above facts is therefore due to violence in nearly every case. If he is not made a meal of by a prowling enemy he will probably be killed in battle, for most wild boars will cheerfully attack anything from a kitten to a locomotive.

Even this reckless valour of the pig has been made use of by man in the districts which once swarmed with rattlesnakes ; and, curiously enough, directly the grunting warrior appears, the snake seems to know that he has met his match. I should not wonder if some very remote and gallant ancestors of the hog bore the brunt of that deadly war between the reptilian and the warm-blooded inhabitants of the earth to which I alluded in a previous paper.

If so we owe him a debt of gratitude greater than we imagine. What if, after all, "the gentleman that pays the rint," were the real St. Patrick who cleared Ireland of snakes ?

LOUIS ROBINSON.